

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 IO-10 ISO-00 EURE-00 AID-05 XMB-02

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SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07 COME-00 ACDA-05 /098 W

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2585

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

AMCONSUL LUANDA

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

DIA WASHDC

CINCLANT NORFOLK VA

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

USNMR SHAPE BRUSSELS BEL

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 2328

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: ELECTION FORECAST: THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

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SUMMARY: DESPITE LACK OF RELIABLE HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS AND

POLLING DATA, BEST GUESS ON FRIDAY'S ELECTORAL RESULTS IS A MODERATE VICTORY, WITH ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF VOTES CAST ACCRUING TO PS, PPD, AND CDS. SOCIALISTS OR PPD WILL PROBABLY CONTEND FOR FIRST PLACE WITH ABOUT 30 PCT APIECE. EITHER THE CDS OR THE PCP COULD BE THIRD. THE PCP-MDP-FSP-MES GRAND TOTAL MAY WELL APPROACH 20-25 PERCENT. THE FAR LEFT IS UNLIKELY TO GARNER MORE THAN 3 PERCENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION THAT THE PORTUGUESE ARE A FUNDAMENTALLY CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE WILL BE TESTED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HALF A CENTURY FRIDAY, APRIL 25, WHEN THE OVER 6 MILLION VOTERS MAKE THEIR CHOICE AMONG TWELVE PARTIES ON THE BALLOT: 8 COMMUNIST-INSPIRED OR -ORIENTED PARTIES, TWO SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES (PS AND PPD), 1 MONARCHIST, AND ONE CONSERVATIVE (CDS).

2. PREDICTION OF RESULTS DIFFICULT:
A NUMBER OF FACTORS MAKE PREDICTION OF THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME HIGHLY UNCERTAIN:

(A) NO VOTING HISTORY:

THESE WILL BE THE FIRST FREE ELECTIONS IN ALMOST HALF A CENTURY. PREVIOUS ELECTIONS WERE MEANINGLESS AS AN INDICATION OF THE IDEOLOGICAL PREFERENCES OF THE ELECTORATE. FURTHERMORE ONLY A SMALL FRACTION OF THE POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE VOTERS PARTICIPATED IN PAST ELECTIONS. FOR MOST PORTUGUESE THESE WILL BE THE FIRST ELECTIONS IN WHICH THEY HAVE VOTED.

(B) PUBLIC OPINION POLL DATA INCOMPETE:

PORTUGAL HAS FEW PUBLIC OPINION POLLING ORGANIZATIONS. THE EXISTING COMPANIES HAVE HAD NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN POLITICAL POLLING. POLLS HAVE BEEN TAKEN PRIVATELY FOR AT LEAST TWO OF THE PARTIES FOR A FEE, BUT THE RESULTS VARY WIDELY BY POLL, PERHAPS A REFLECTION OF FAULTY METHODS OR THE TYPE OF QUESTION ASKED. PERSONS POLLED ARE SUSPICIOUS, AND WE ARE TOLD BY POLLSTERS THAT RESPONDENTS OFTEN REFUSE TO STATE HOW THEY WILL VOTE OR THEY TELL THE INTERVIEWER WHAT THEY THINK HE WISHES TO HEAR. THE UPSHOT IS THAT WHILE POLLING DATA EXIST, THEY PROVIDE NO CERTAIN CLUES AS TO THE POLITICAL PREFERENCES OF THE POPULATION.

(C) ABSTENTION AN UNKNOWN:

VOTING, UNLIKE VOTER REGISTRATION, IS NOT LEGALLY REQUIRED, CONFIDENTIAL

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ALTHOUGH IT IS ENCOURAGED. HOWEVER, IT IS AGAINST THE LAW TO URGE ABSTENTION ELECTION DAY. WE SUSPECT THAT ABSTENTIONS WILL HURT THE MODERATE PARTIES MORE THAN THE LEFTIST AND FAR-LEFTIST PARTIES, THE ASSUMPTION BEING THAT A SILENT CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY EXISTS BUT MUST BE CONVINCED THAT ITS VOTE HAS MEANING AND THAT IT CAN VOTE WITHOUT FEAR OF VIOLENCE. THE CONSERVATIVE INDIVIDUAL MAY STAY HOME APRIL 25 EITHER OUT OF CONVICTION THAT EVERYTHING HAS BEEN DECIDED WITH THE SIGNING OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PLATFORM

OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT, OR OUT OF FEAR THAT THE FAR LEFT WILL ASSUALT HIM AT THE VOTING PLACE. THE MODERATE PARTIES ARE FOCUSING ON THESE TWO FACTORS IN THEIR PROPAGANDA IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET THE VOTER TO THE POLLS. THE FAR LEFT IS THREATENING VIOLENCE AT THE POLLS. NO ONE CAN BE CONFIDENT WHETHER THE ELECTORATE WILL VOTE OR STAY HOME.

(D) BLANK VOTE QUESTION:

FURTHER COMPLICATING PREDICTION IS THE APPEAL BY A NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE "POLITICALLY IGNORANT" VOTER TO CAST A BLANK BALLOT ELECTION DAY. CERTAIN LEADERS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL INITIATED THIS APPEAL, WHICH HAS BEEN DECLARED LEGAL BY THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION, AND WHICH HAS BEEN TAKEN UP BY THE INTERSINDICAL, AND STRONGLY OPPOSED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND SOCIALIST PARTY, AND THE PPD AND THE CDS. THE PRESIDENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER HAVE REMAINED SILET ON THIS CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE. AS IS THE CASE WITH ABSTENTION, NO ONE KNOWS HOW THE ELECTORATE WILL REACT TO THE BLANK VOTE APPEAL. THE MODERATE PARTIES SEE THE APPEAL AS AN ATTEMPT BY THE AFM TO TURN THE ELECTIONS INTO A VICTORY FOR ITSELF. THEY SUSPECT THAT AFTER THE ELECTIONS, IF THE BLANK AND NULL VOTE TOTALS ARE HIGH, THE AFM WILL CLAIM THE RESULTS SHOW THAT THE PARTIES COULD NOT REACH AND CONVINCE THE PEOPLE, A TASK WHICH ONLY THE MILITARY CAN ACCOMPLISH.

(E) FRAUD:

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO MINIMIZE THE CHANCES OF FRAUD. ALTHOUGH NOT LIKELY TO OCCUR TO ANY GREAT EXTENT, FRAUD IS POSSIBLE, AND SOME POSSIBLE TACTICS TO DISTORT THE RESULTS HAVE COME TO OUR ATTENTION. ON THE WHOLE, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT EVEN IF FRAUD OCCURS THE RESULTS WILL NOT BE SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED. NEVERTHELESS THE DEGREE OF FRAUD IS AN IMPONDERABLE.

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3. HOW THE MODERATE PREDICT THE RESULTS:

EMBASSY CONTACTS IN THE SOCIALST, PPD AND CDS PARTIES GENERALLY FORESEE THE FOLLOWING OUTCOME:

SOCILAST PARTY: 32 PERCENT

PPD 28 PERCENT

PCP 15 PERCENT

CDS 15 PERCENT

MDP/CDE 5 PERCENT

PPM 2 PERCENT

FAR LEFT 3 PERCENT COMBINED

THE GUESS AT THE SIZE OF THE BLANK AND NULL VOTE IS AROUND 5 PERCENT, MOST OF THAT BEING SPOILED BALLOTS SPREAD EVENLY.

4. LATEST POLL RESULTS:

THE LATEST OPINION POLL OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE, TAKEN FOR THE

SOCIALISTS ABOUT A WEEK AGO, SHOWS THAT 48 PERCENT OF THE
RESPONDENTS HAD NO OPINION, WERE UNWILLING TO ANSWER, OR HAD NOT
YET MADE UP THEIR MINDS HOW THEY WOULD VOTE. OF THOSE THAT NAMED A
PARTY, THE RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

SOCIALISTS: 21 PERCENT

PPD 13 PERCENT

PCP 6 PERCENT

MDP 2 PERCENT

REST 10 PERCENT.

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